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Mr. Kenneth L. Adelman  
Institute for Contemporary Studies  
1800 K Street, N.W.  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Ken:

I was going to ignore your article, but because I will be seeing you at the party for Russ on the 20th, I changed my mind about responding.

Your article on "Was our intelligence astray in the Gulf?" is really off the mark. You don't have the right facts and therefore, you draw a whole set of erroneous conclusions. I am surprised that you, of all people, would base an article on what you read in the newspaper about intelligence judgments. Maybe we can discuss this further on the 20th.

STAT

Richard J. Kerr

Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

(+ Thanks for the invitation)

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**KEN ADELMAN**

# Was our intelligence astray in the Gulf?

**W**as the CIA a loser in the Gulf war? So pundits around Washington are saying, with some hefty backing.

"I am generally convinced there was a failure of strategic intelligence leading up to the conflict," said Oklahoma Sen. David Boren, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. "Two months out, one month out, there were not adequate warnings to policy-makers that Iraq could be a problem."

True to form, Mr. Boren's committee, and that in the House, plan to hold hearings soon on intelligence failures in the Gulf war.

True to form, the CIA anticipated these committees would hold hearings. That knowledge directed and distorted its deportment during the crisis.

That's partly why the CIA turned CYA, covering its you-know-what.

For the intelligence community made heroic efforts to warn about every imaginable disaster, and a host of unimaginable ones to boot. Should any calamity have happened — regardless how far, far-fetched — the CIA would thus be covered. It could then present to those Intelligence Committees its memos documenting just how it had warned all readers of whatever disaster befell us.

After the crisis, it comes off merely as prudent. During the crisis, it comes off mostly as posturing. For a flurry of memos from Chicken Little, each telling which part of the sky could then be about to fall, added clutter to the already confusing "fog of war."

This CIA-turned-CYA perspective helps explain what seems a rather consistent pattern of mid-crisis CIA exaggerations. The intelligence community overestimated:

- The dangers of Iraqi chemical SCUD missile attacks.
- The unleashing of worldwide terrorist attacks by Saddam Hussein's network.
- The number of Iraqi troops in the Kuwaiti theater.
- The number of Iraqi tanks remaining operational after the month-long air campaign.

It's fair enough to warn policy-makers, especially during war, of imminent dangers and risks. Indeed, that's a real service. However, in performing that service, the CIA could have been expected to downplay certain dangers and overplay others.

Here, they seemed to overplay all — even when evidence may have pointed otherwise, or when others contended otherwise. For instance, on the last point — the number of Iraqi tanks remaining operational after our air bombardment — Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf's command figured far fewer than the CIA on the eve of the ground attack.

Actually, that number turned out even smaller than Gen. Schwarzkopf reckoned. Few even then suspected that Iraqi commanders were of the same mind as German Gen. Erich von Ludendorff, who told the kaiser after a brief visit with the Austrian army on the eve of World War I: "We are allied to a corpse."

The CIA's pattern of midwar exaggerations — along with the lack of any apparent covert operations against Saddam and his henchmen — suggests the quest for a risk-free intelligence community. Following what was perceived, unfairly I believe, as William Casey's free-wheeling ways, the CIA may have been overly concerned about keeping clean and leaving no conceivable disaster go without warning.

It also shows too keen attention to postwar congressional opinions, rather than in-crisis administration knowledge.

While the upcoming hearings should focus on these midwar matters, they're more likely to zero in on the prewar lack of intelligence that Saddam would attack and conquer Kuwait. Mr. Boren's comments thus far suggest this.

Granted, there was a failure of imagination, but that was shared by everyone within the U.S. government and everyone throughout the Arab world. The Kuwaitis and Egyptians were as startled by Saddam's heist as was the CIA.

The Washington Post \_\_\_\_\_  
 The New York Times \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Washington Times D-4  
 The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Christian Science Monitor \_\_\_\_\_  
 New York Daily News \_\_\_\_\_  
 USA Today \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Chicago Tribune \_\_\_\_\_

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And this is a familiar failure, and an almost unavoidable one. Yet, it regularly prompts criticism. As the shah of Iran tumbled from the Peacock Throne in November 1978, President Carter issued a handwritten memo to his top advisers, which opened pungently, "I am not satisfied with the quality of political intelligence."

Similar human frailty led the British ambassador in Berlin, two days before the outset of World War I, to report that war was still out of the question. The same syndrome afflicted American leaders on the eve of Pearl Harbor, Stalin at the outset of Operation Barbarossa — Hitler's 1941 invasion of Russia — and the Israelis right before the 1973 Yom Kippur War — the most celebrated intelligence failures of recent times.

The only way to avoid more of these instances is to develop an intelligence community that is not risk-averse. One that is so gutsy, shrewd and ruthless that it is unafraid of mistakes. One so confident that no trend or fashion could ever screen data or warp perceptions which emanate from official "group-think." One which seeks such penetrating national intelligence that no degree of conformity — with the press, with academia, or with political fashion — can force blunders.

That's a tall order for any intelligence community at any time.

*Kenn Aaelman is a nationally syndicated columnist.*